

The PRESERVATIVE of
VIRTUOUS YOUTH.

A
SERMON

Preach'd May 17. 1714.

TO THE
SOCIETY
OF
YOUNG PERSONS

CATECHIZED

By the Reverend

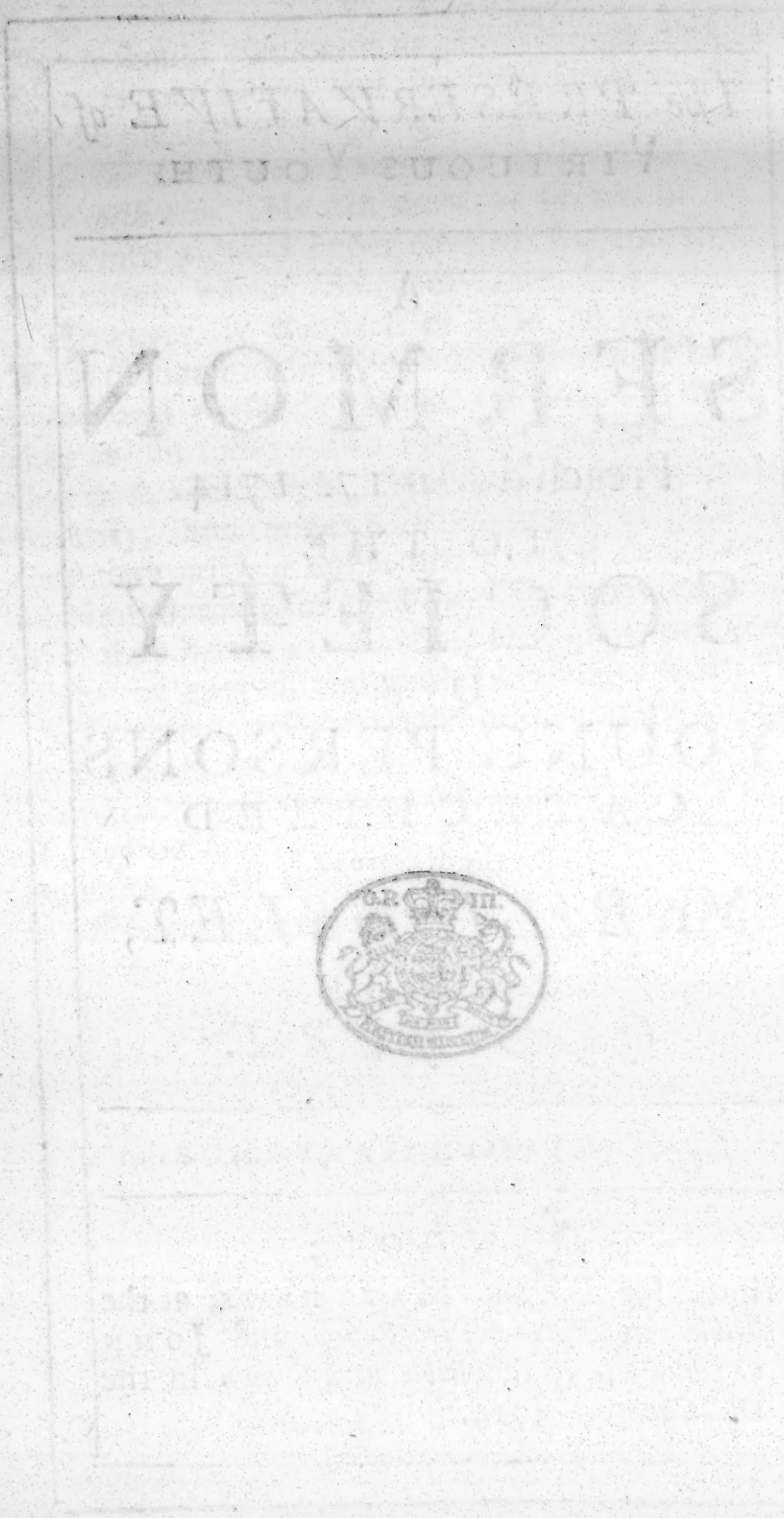
Mr. *BILINGSLEY*,

IN THE
OLD-FUR T.

By BENJAMIN GRAVENOR. *provenor* R

LONDON:

Printed for EMAN. MATTHEWS, at the
Bible in Pater-Noster-Row, and JOHN
CLARK, at the Bible and Crown in the
Old-Change. 1714. *pr 6d.*



I was
k

I

Field
in a
the
off h
who
and
gers
his S
with

D
(say
my
the
bow
tor
He
Wh
sion
Go

PSALM XVIII. 23.

*I was also upright before Him, and I
kept my self from mine Iniquity.*

IN the Day when God had delivered *David* out of the Hand of all his Enemies, and out of the Hand of *Saul*, the most bitter and dangerous of them all, he spake this Song of Triumph. He triumphs in the Sanctuary for what God had done for him in the Field, and brings those Lawrels he had gather'd in a successful Campaign, and lays them down at the Feet of God. He describes his Dangers to set off his Deliverance, and to glorifie its Author, who, as he had before taught *his Hands to war and his Fingers to fight*, now teaches the same Fingers to strike the trembling String, and inspires his Song with all the Fervours of Devotion, and with all the Beauties of sacred Poetry.

David cries out in his Distress, v. 6. *And* (says he) *He heard my Voice out of His Temple, and my Cry came before Him even into His Ears. Then the Earth shook and trembled — The Heavens bow down, the Earth trembles, the Hills are torn up from their Foundations; He comes, nay, He rides, He flies upon the Wings of the Wind — What Dispatch? What Speed? What an Impression does the Creation feel of the descending God —? The Matter was, an Upright Man in*
A 2 Distress;

4 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

Distress; the Evidence of that Uprightness was, *v. 21. For I have kept the Ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God, for all his Judgments were before me, and I did not put away His Statutes from me. I was also upright before Him, and I kept my self from mine Iniquity.*

It is not certain to me whether this Psalm was composed after the Affair of *Uriah*, tho' it seems to be placed as if it were, *2 Sam. 22.* However, if it were so, the Exception that the Scripture has made in *David's* Character, must be implied here, That *David was right in the Eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any Thing that He commanded him, all the Days of his Life, save in the Matter of Uriah, the Hittite, 1 Kings 15. 5.* Besides, the Denomination of a Person is not to be taken from a single Action, but from the habit and frame of Spirit, the tenour and course of Life. As one good Action, tho' never so excellent, could not denominate him a good Man, who is habitually and prevailingly bad, so neither can one bad Action denominate him a bad Man, who is habitually and prevailingly good; no more than a single speck upon any Face can denominate the whole Complexion. Even *Abraham's* Faith once totter'd, and *Peter's* steady Resolution failed, without ruining either of their proper Characters; the one was still the Father of the Faithful, and the other was nevertheless an honest Heart. And further, sincere Repentance secures the denomination of Uprightness, as truly as perfect Innocence. I say, sincere and true Repentance, not that whining in a Morning for a Debauch over Night, that permits the return to the same Sin, upon the return of the Occasion, and so on, to Sin and Repent in a Circle; but
such

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 5

such Repentance as changes the Heart and Mind, turns the Course and Life, from Sin to God and Goodness; to live *godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present World.* And the same Grace that justifies such a Sinner, and it justifies no other, will allow such an one, notwithstanding his Fall, to say, *I was also Upright before Him, and I kept my self from mine Iniquity.*

Had I designed to Preach over all this Text, I must have observed to you, that here is a most excellent Character, one of them in the World, *I was Upright before Him,* and the surest Proof of it that could be given, *I kept my self from mine Iniquity;* and all this subjected to the strictest Test and Observation that could be named, it was *before God, under his Eye.* My concern will be chiefly with the latter Part of these Words, *I kept my self from mine Iniquity.* And if I can help you to do so, I am perswaded I shall do you such Service as you will thank God for, the longest Day you have to live, and after that to Eternity.

Knowledge and Practice are the *whole of Man;* without Knowledge the Heart can't be good, and without Practice the Knowledge is good for nothing; nay, so far worse than nothing, as it intitles to the greater number of Stripes. As for Knowledge, you are in the best Way imaginable of attaining a considerable Degree, a Method that deserves the Encouragement of all, that are sensible of the Consequence of having the best Principles well planted in the rising Generation; and under the Conduct and Direction of a Person, at whose Feet, even they who are Teachers of others would be glad to sit.

Every one has some Sin that does *most easily beset him,* that may be called *his Iniquity,* whether it
arises

6 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

arises from the Constitution of the Body, which is observed to incline the *Sanguine* to Lightness, Vanity, and Wantonness; the *Choloric* to Passion and Resentment; the *Pblegmatic* to Idleness, Sloth, and Carelessness; the *Melancholy* to Suspicion, Jealousie, and a soweriness of Temper: Or, whether it arises from the *Age of Life* wherein we are, all Ages having their particular Temptations; those of Youth are many, but they mostly spring out of this one Thing, an *addictedness to Pleasure*, and sensual Delights; hence all those Inclinations which the Apostle calls *youthful Lusts*; not but that they are often found in other Ages, but they especially belong to this: Or whether it be the predominancy of some *prevailing Passion* or Affection, or occasioned by the *Callings* and Business we are placed in, and the Affairs of Life we respectively pursue; or from the opposite States of *Prosperity* or *Adversity*; or from the *Company* we keep, or the *Times* we live in: From some, or all of these, may arise that Sin which you may call *your Iniquity*. You may further pursue the Discovery by such Marks as these.

'Tis that Sin we are most naturally inclined to, and consequently do most easily slide into the Commission of; or in the Apostles Phrase, *The Sin that doth most easily beset us*; 'tis commonly the Master-sin, and that upon which all other Sins and Lusts are made to attend; 'tis that which engrosses our Time and Thoughts; 'tis that Sin which we can least bear the Reproof of; 'tis that Sin that flies in our Face upon the Apprehension of Danger, Sicknes or Death; 'tis that which we are most inclined to wish no Sin, and to grudge at the Divine Law for having made it one by His Prohibition; that Sin, which, when we are al-
most

most
Chri
brou
of G
latef
does
Perfe
chief
and
T
only
it; b
natio
Flesh
fo r
Bloo
sinful
them.

I.

II.

I.
from
B
prot
any
ny f
offer
youn
ed o
show
a de
mak
Cha

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 7

most converted, hinders us from being altogether Christians; 'tis that which we are most hardly brought to part with at last, even when the Grace of God does prevail in us, and what we do the latest give up, and what after our Conversion, does most hazard our Relapse, and endanger our Perseverance; and is the only, or at least the chief Obstacle, to the most flourishing Grace, and to the fullest Evidence of Uprightness.

To keep our selves from this, signifies, not only to abstain from the outward Commission of it; but to subdue and mortify the inward Inclinations; *for they that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts thereof.* They so regulate the *natural Affections* of Flesh and Blood, as that they shall not govern; and subdue the *sinful ones*, so as they shall not have *Dominion over them.* To assist you in which I shall lay before you,

I. The Directions how we may keep our selves from this Our Iniquity.

II. The Motives.

I. Some *Directions* how we may keep our selves from these our *Iniquities.*

Before I proceed, I think my self bound to protest to you, that I am not going to prejudice any of your lawful Pleasures, nor has Religion any such Tendency or Design. I know I am not offering any Thing that will rob you of what young People are so much afraid of being spoiled of, Pleasure and Delight: No, I am rather showing you how to improve them, to give them a deeper Relish, and by making them truer to make them greater, to turn them into a purer Channel, without abating their Tide, and show
how

8 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

how they may run into, and join with, those Rivers of Pleasure that are at God's Right Hand for evermore. To that end,

§ 1. *Begin with true Repentance for all the Instances of the Commission of it already.*

Where Christ began His Preaching, we must begin the Practice of the Gospel, Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand. So David begins his stricter Walk, and purer Life, with Repentance for what was already done, *Purge me with Hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than Snow.* Peter went out and wept bitterly: And *Zacheus* upon the Spot, promises an immediate Reparation of any Thing got by Injustice and Fraud. Delay not Repentance for a Day; we are not to let the Sun go down upon our own Wrath, much less (says one) should we let the Sun go down upon God's. Every Delay of Repentance is a Step to final Impenitence, which is utterly unpardonable.

§ 2. *Come to a Resolve with your selves, what you will do, and be, and how you will act as to this Iniquity.*

Are you come to a Resolution, to set your selves in earnest, to endeavour to keep your selves from your Iniquity? to be Holy in this World, and Happy in the next? have you issu'd that Matter with your selves, and brought it to a Point, that you are resolved to go to Heaven, what ever it cost? Or like *Austin* before his Conversion, do you only pray with your Lips, to be kept from your Iniquity, while at the same Time, your Heart says, *not yet Lord?* You have a Mind to taste a little more of it first. That I may be better understood, I will suppose now, One, who finds it an hard Matter to keep himself from his Iniquity, to have retired into his Chamber,

and

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 9

and there setting himself down, and reviewing the Struggles of his Soul, the Arts of the Tempter, and the Danger of his Case, I will suppose such an one, to call upon himself thus ;

Oh my Soul, I summon thee this Day to a Debate of infinite Importance. And oh my God I pray Thee be present at it, be present with the Awe of thy Majesty, and the Influence of thy Grace. Here is a certain Sin that does easily beset me, if I don't conquer that, it will conquer me. If I don't destroy that, it will destroy me ; likely in this World, but surely in the next. If I don't keep my self from that, that will keep me out of Heaven. To be banish'd from God as a Sot addicted to my Lust, is what I cannot bear the Thoughts of ! And yet to bid adieu to this my darling Iniquity, is what I cannot bear to think of neither. 'Tis *cutting off a right Hand, it is plucking out a right Eye*, nay, I sometimes think I could more easily do either, or both of those. I have hitherto saved it with Shifts and Evasions ; I have colour'd it over with Pretences and Excuses ; But I find I must either part with that, or with my God, my Heaven, my Happiness ! That's a Thought again, which, I cannot bear ! to live without God in this World, to die without God into another, and be without Him for ever ! — Oh God, can the Scales hang long in Suspence between a God and a Lust ? Can I suffer a paultry Inclination to put such an Indignity upon the greatest and best of Beings ? No, I am resolved, it shall bleed and die, a Sacrifice to the Pleasure of Heaven. Let it draw Tears from the Eye, nay Blood from the Heart, it shall go. Tho' it crosses the Grain of Flesh and Blood, tho' it wrench and tare away its darling Inclina-

10 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

tions and Appetite, as if the inward Strings of my Heart were drawing out by slow Degrees; it is but a Temporal Conflict! It secures endless Delight. Is it not better to enter into Life maimed? I have sworn and will not repent, I will keep thy righteous Judgments. I have sworn it in my Baptismal Dedication, if I own it and take it upon me. I have sworn it in the Resolutions at my Conversion, if I know any Thing of that Grace of God. I have sworn it at a Sacramental Table, if I have approached it, in a due Manner. And I swear it afresh this Day, as an Oath for Confirmation, to end this Strife between my God, and my Lust, So help me God.

§ 3. *Go on to harden your selves against it, by all the Considerations, that can affect the Man, or move the Christian.*

Slight no Thought that may be of Use, tho' you prefer such as are most genuine, and of the most evangelical Strain. It's a Mercy to be kept from Sin, let the Motive be what it will: Whether from Reputation, Interest, Hope or Fear. But 'tis a Sign of a more excellent Spirit, to act in this Matter, from the nobler Principles of the Love of God, *constraining us*, to deny our selves a little for Him, who deny'd Himself so much, and so long for us. To act up to the Dignity of our Character, and the Approbation of the greatest Judge. All Thoughts don't affect all Persons, nor at all Times alike. There is a Baseness and Meanness in some Compliances, that a Man gets over, by the Help of that Affront they carry in them, to the Opinion we ought to maintain of our selves, as Men, or as Christians.

What, has the Grace of God given me no Power over my self? No Command of the Inferior

ferior
there
sera
seem
vers
the g
Rate
Pow
Tha
the C
no I
any
mine
had
Dark
Goo
sets
him
that
was
only
bese
as w
Real
in o
to h
such
ded.
Rea
can
And
all t
God
ved
T
Ten
quit

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. II

ferior Appetites? Must I obey them in the Lusts thereof, tho' I know their vile Nature, and miserable Consequences? Why then, I am, it seems, not my own Man. I am a Slave to divers Lusts and Pleasures. I am not brought into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God.—At this Rate it is plain, had any Thing else an equal Power over me, I must have obeyed it. No Thanks then either to the Reason of a Man, or the Conscience of a Christian, in me, that I am no Drunkard, Blasphemer, Thief, Adulterer, any Thing else, that had happened to have been *mine Iniquity*, for the same Reason, would have had the Dominion, as this has, because it is my Darling. Why then if any Man steals my Goods, ravishes, plunders or murders my Friend, sets Fire to my House in Revenge, it must excuse him with me, when I am given to understand that, *either* of these was his Darling Sin, and he was under the Power of them. For this is the only Plea I have for the Sin that does so easily beset me: And if it be a Plea for me, it will do as well for others, and with equal Strength and Reason. At this Rate it seems, I want nothing in order to commit the vilest Things, but only to have them become my darling Sins, and as such, to be excused, coloured, retained, defended. And has not any Man in the World as much Reason as this comes to for the worst Things he can do, *viz.* he loved them above all others? And have not our Children as good Reason for all the Evil they do, tho' never so offensive to God or us, or injurious to Man? *viz.* they loved it best?

Think, Oh my Soul, further, of the Nature, Tendency and Consequences of this thine Iniquity.

12 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

That this is a Sin, I am always perswaded in cool Blood, and calm Reflection. After all the Artifices that corrupt Nature has used to excuse, disguise, and colour it, to make it pass for none. When it is to be committed, the Evidence is hardly heard, but when Conscience is at Liberty to speak, especially when Trouble and Affliction, when Sicknes and Death are in View, then it appears like it self, however desirous I was of retaining some Opinion of it before. — Can I be conscious of my Indulgence to this with any Consistence either with my Safety or Comfort? Don't I find how it inclines me more and more to Sin, till at length I may be *hardened thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin*? Does it not argue a great Degree of that evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God? Does it not make me less afraid of Sin? For why should I be more afraid of any other Sin, than of this? Do not I find it estranges me from God and Christ, from their Company and Communion, and from praying to Him, and delighting in Him? or if to stop the Clamours of Conscience upon notorious Neglect, I do drag my Body into a Closet Retirement, is it not more like the formal Visit of Strangers, than the Interview of Friends? besides, *If I regard Iniquity in my Heart, will the Lord hear my Prayer*? and am I able to go on praying without any Hope of being heard? does it not weaken the essential Parts of practical Godliness? inward Purity and Peace, Communion with God, and the obeyed Influence of the Blessed Spirit?

Go on my Soul, to excite a Holy Indignation and Scorn at thy self, for being so much within the Power of any Thing so unworthy.

What,

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 13

What, must then the inferior Faculty govern the superior? must the Body govern the Soul, the Appetite the Reason, the Brute the Man? Lord! shall a single Inclination, common to Me with Brutes, be too hard for Reason, Conscience, God, Heaven and the eternal Weight of Glory? Do I really believe that the Heaven of eating, drinking, and sporting, is better of the two, than the Heaven my Bible speaks of? *Mahometans* have the Sense to add Eternity to such a Sort of an Heaven of theirs, and am I contented with one of a Moment, meerly because it is present? For the Heaven my Bible speaks of, it seems I wont do, nor suffer any Thing; but for the present Heaven of eating, drinking, sporting and Pleasure, I am willing to do and suffer a great deal, even to lose my God, and endure eternal Hell, for I am not yet an Infidel. — But is this to be born withal? — Indignation choak those Lusts in their Rise, that would carry us into such Absurdities as these! Absurdities that are not capable of being aggravated, because there can be no greater Follies by which to expose them, for there can be nothing greater than Heaven, nothing more miserable than Hell, nothing longer than Eternity, or better than God!

Take it then as it is acted over in Matter of Fact every Day. There is a Man of Figure, of Sense and Conduct; Nay, it may be, we are in Civility obliged to own him upon his outside Appearance, a Man of Religion, Conscience and Honour; a Person of some Granduer of Spirit, and of such Pretensions, that he would cock up his Hat in Defiance to any one that should challenge him, on any of the foremention'd Articles: This is a very fine Gentleman; but now let his

14 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

his darling Sin demand his Attendance, let the Lust kindle, and the Appetite give the Signal for Gratification; no Spaniel Dog is more fawning, truckling, submissive, yeilding and obsequious than he, to the commanding Lust. Let my Soul blush with infinite Scorn, that ever these base Slaves should usurp the Throne of their rightful Lord, and unman me; and depose my Reason, which is all I have to show that I am not a *Beast*; and bear down my Conscience, which is all I have to show that I am a *Christian*.

Morn. Lecture
Vol. —

§ 4. *Exercise the Graces that are most opposite to the Sin you would keep your selves from.*

Such as Temperance, if your Iniquity be drinking. Liberality if you are inclined to a close and covetous Love of the World. If thine Iniquity be Wantonness, set the Limits and Barriers of Decorum a little more strait, and keep more strictly within them, to cut off all Occasions. This Exercise of opposite Graces, is of great Use upon several Accounts. Partly by Way of *Revenge* upon former Failings. Partly to gain and confirm the *Habits* of Grace; which are acquired by Exercise: And whatsoever is once become habitual is done with Ease and Pleasure, however difficult it might have been before. And partly by Way of *Revulsion*, to pluck back the Mind, and turn the Soul and Thoughts another Way. As bleeding at the Nose is sometimes stopt by opening a Vein, so may we sometimes check the Encroachment of our Darling Sin, by a resolute diverting the Thoughts, and calling off the Mind to better Things.

§ 5. *Maintain your Relish for spiritual Delights and intellectual Pleasures, for Peace of Mind, and Joy in God.* Let

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 15

Let 'em know you don't want for Pleasures. Pleasures that add *no Sorrow with them*. That leave no Stain upon the Name, no Sting upon the Conscience, no Guilt upon the Soul. Pleasures that will bear the Review, and spring afresh upon Reflection. Communion with God, Peace of Mind, Joy in the Holy Ghost, present Grace and Favour, and future Prospects. Never let me think these Consolations of God so small as to be exchanged for what a transitory Lust can offer. No Tempter, you bid me much to my Loss. If I must part with Communion with God, Joy in the Holy Ghost, Peace of Conscience, Calmness and sweet Tranquility of Spirit, Delightful Prospects of living Pure, dying Safe and Comfortable, and rising Happy and Glorious. What? part with these Pleasures, that will solace me when alone, in the dark, when deserted, and abandon'd by all others, and in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, part with these, for— for what?—for Sorrow, Darkness, Guilt, Fear, Repentance; *Nolo tanti emere Pœnitentiam*, I will not buy Repentance at so dear a Rate, for Repentance must follow in one World or other— No, says the Tempter, you misrepresent my Proposal, 'tis Pleasure, young Man, that I offer you in Exchange.—*Get thee behind me Satan*, thy Pleasures perish with thee, that are the Bait to my Destruction, and the Price of my Soul. I must part with great Pleasures, for little ones. Lasting for Transitory, Innocent and Divine, for Guilty and Criminal, Profitable and Useful, for those which profit not. For *what Fruit shall I have in those Things whereof I know I shall be ashamed*. *Voluptas transit, Turpe, Factum manet*, the Turpitude, Guilt and Shame, will last a long long

16 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

long while, after the Pleasure is vanisht.

Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the Lusts of the Flesh, Gal. 5. 16. invite his Presence, observe his Commands, yeild to his Dictates and Motions, cultivate his Graces, give in to that Frame of Soul, that calm, heavenly, divine Frame, that may evidence the dear Inmate to have taken up his Residence in you, and then *the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus,* will make you free from the Law of Sin and Death.

§ 6. *Lay into your Mind such Parts of the Word of God, as are directly against your darling Sins, and may be ready to assist you against their Temptations.*

The Ammunition should not be to seek, when it should be used. We combat the same Enemy in a Temptation as the Captain of our Salvation fought with, *Mat. 4.* and it must be with the same Weapon, *the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God,* it is written, *wherewithall shall a young Man cleanse his Ways but by taking heed thereto according to thy Word?* it is written, *thy Word have I hid in my Heart that I might not sin against Thee.* Hid in my Heart, (*i. e.*) in the Understanding by Knowledge; in the Affection by Love; in the Judgment by prizing and valuing it; in the Memory by retaining it there for Use. As thus, in two Instances only.

Suppose your Iniquity to be drinking, how seasonable an Hint would it be to some, who are flourishing their Parts over an intemperate Glass, and are never greater Divines, than when they are most Sots, how seasonable I say, would these Scriptures be, *add to thy Knowledge Temperance. Take heed to your selves, lest at any Time your Heart be overcharged, with Surfeiting and Drunk-*

Drum
pan
not a
filled
Day
of the
welli
that
that
Wine
strong
there
drink
and
Nigh
Wine
Drum
Sleep
O
Lust
such
Natu
This
you s
ordin
cham
Jesu
posse
lust o
not G
but u
you
Lust
evil
stran
Hear

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 17

Drunkenness; either thro' the pleasure of Company, lucre of Gain, or lust of Wine. Be not drunk with Wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit. Let us walk honestly as in the Day, not in rioting and drunkenness. Now the Works of the Flesh are manifest, envyings, drunkenness, revelling, and such like, of which I have told you before that they shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. He that loveth Pleasure shall be poor, and he that loveth Wine and Oil shall not be rich. Wine is a mocker, strong Drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Woe unto them that are mighty to drink Wine, Men of strength to mingle strong Drink, and rise up early in the Morning, and continue until Night, till the Wine inflame them. Be not among Wine-bibbers, nor riotous eaters of Flesh; for the Drunkard and the Glutton shall come to poverty, and the Sleeper shall be cloathed with rags.

Or if the Sin that most easily besets you, be Lust and Wantonness, bear down upon it with such Scriptures as these, which shew the evil Nature and mischievous Consequences of it. *This is the Will of God, even your Sanctification, that you should abstain from Fornication, Uncleaness, inordinate Affections, and evil Concupiscence. Not in chambering and wantonness, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, that every one of you may know how to possess his Vessel in Sanctification and Honour, not in lust of Concupiscence, even as the Gentiles that know not God, for God hath not called us to Uncleaness, but unto Holiness. Dearly beloved Brethren, I beseech you as Pilgrims and Strangers, abstain from fleshly Lusts which war against the Soul. Keep thee from the evil Woman that flattereth with her Tongue, from the strange Woman. Lust not after her Beauty in thine Heart, nor let her take thee with her Eye-lids.*

18 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

a Man take Fire in his Bosom and his Cloaths not be burnt? For it's a Fire that consumeth to Destruction, and would root out all thine Increase; will bring a Man to a Morsel of Bread, 'tis a deep Ditch, and the abhor'd of the Lord do fall therein. Let no Man therefore deceive you with vain Words, for because of these Things the Wrath of God cometh upon the Children of disobedience. Some of these Scriptures presenting themselves in the very Season, have been known to preserve from the brink of Ruin, and had they been regarded as they should, there would not have been so many Confessors to Lust, now walking the Streets in Rags, or rotting in Goals; nor would so many Martyrs to the Devil have expir'd in Horror and Putrefaction.

§ 7. *Lay by also some proper Answers, and ready Replies to the Insinuations and Delusions of the Enemy, especially such as you have before known to have been of Force and Influence. As thus,*

It will be represented, no doubt, how pleasant to the Appetite? How delightful to the Fancy——? But before the pleasing Poyson has run up into the Veins, and wound it self into the intangled Affection, shake off the Viper presently, with replying, —— Pleasant you say, but will it be pleasant after Commision? Will it be pleasant upon the Review? Are the Pangs of a wounded Conscience pleasant? Or the uneasiness of a withdrawn God? Can that be pleasant, that must be mixed with the Tho'ts of a lost Heaven, an angry God, and an eternal Hell? Besides, is nothing pleasant but this? Is there no Pleasure but what comes in by the Senses? Are not Angels pleasant without that for which I languish? Will it not be more pleasant to look back upon the Conquest of this Pleasure? A God pleased, Grace

acted

acted
the f
Are
prosp
living
out t
And
last l
are c
told,
or fa
Quic
not
whic
is a
adva
that
shall
in a
succ
hono
Cou
the
that
Hon
on c
me
to g
wha
whe
You
as i
Goo
ther
Gif
real

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 19

acted and evidenced, all Heaven delighted with the spectacle of my Combate and Conquest. Are not Peace of Conscience, Joy in God, the prospect of Heaven, the smiles of a Saviour, the living above the fears of Death, and dying without the fears of Hell, are not these pleasant too? And which Pleasures of these two, are likely to last longest and end happiest? — Some who are of an aspiring Genius, ambitious, will be told, that this Course will lead them to Honour, or save them from the Contempt of Men——. Quickly reply, It may be not; every one does not reach the Condition he aims at, and to which he makes his Conscience a footstep; there is a noble Text that some times lies cross to the advancement Men aim at in a sinful way, *They that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed of.* Shall I aim at Honour in a Way dishonourable to God, and hope to succeed? Is not the *Reproach of Christ* really more honourable? Will it not be esteemed so in the Court of Heaven, the best Judges of Honour in the World? Can I call that honourable here, that will disgrace me to Eternity? Does not the Honour that comes from God satisfy the Ambition of the highest Order of Angels——? Tell me not of Gain, For, *What shall it profit a Man to gain the whole World and loose his own Soul, or, what profit hath the Hypocrite, tho' he hath gained, when God shall take away his Soul——?* Besides, You tell me of Pleasures, Profits and Honours, as if God had none to bestow, as if Purity, Goodness and Truth, had none that belonged to them; know, that my God has all these in his Gift; *even durable Riches and Honours, true, solid, real, lasting, everlasting——*; Ay, but no Body

20 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

sees—— Why? Hast thou put out the All-seeing Eye of God? Or is such Language as this to be born by God or Man? To say no body sees but God; Is God no-body? Who will bring every *secret Thing to light* before Angels and Men. Is not Conscience instead of a thousand Witnesses? And God greater than our Conscience, *and knoweth all Things, and is much more able to condemn——*. Well, but it's only in a small Instance it is but a little one——, but a little one! A Man can never promise himself where to stop, that once consents. The vilest Enormities, and the greatest Apostacies have had their beginnings in little Sins, as the greatest Fires have risen from a single spark; and Gangrenes that have threatned Life, and Limb, have proceeded from a small scratch of a Pin. Our Sins are seldom stinted by our own Intentions, but when we give Guilt leave to go *so far*, it will go *farther* without our leave; and so those ill Habits will insensibly lead us on to pure Enmity with God, in which at first we intended no more than the bare pleasing of our Passions.

I shall, to render this Direction more perfect, and useful, close it with some Maxims of great Use this way, which have been enlarged upon by the Writers upon this Subject.

The best Wisdom is to do, not what is best in some few Respects only, but what is absolutely best, lovely and desirable.

A good Conscience is a continual Feast.

God alone is enough for thine Happiness (if it be proper to say God alone, of Him who is *All in All*) but without Him, it is infinitely impossible for any Thing to be enough.

Thy

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 21

Thy Soul is more worthy thy Care than thy Carcase; the Life to come than this, Eternity than Time.

Not the Opinions of Men, especially of those lull'd asleep by voluptuousness and sensuality, but God's Estimate of Matters must be the wisest Rule, and the Opinion of the best and wisest Men, or if you will, even of the worst of Men too, when they come to be sick and die, or when they come to Judgment.

Repentance is always bought too dear, whatever we give for it, but everlasting Happiness can't be so.

The hardest Doings or Sufferings for Christ are infinitely easier than everlasting Misery.

Heaven and Happiness will more than Recompence all the Self-denial and Mortification, that we can ever go throw to make them sure.

In the mean Time, the very Hope of it, besides the Peace of God that *passeth all Understanding*; the Grace of God, and Comforts of the Spirit, will sweeten thy Way to Heaven with inexpressible Satisfaction, with Joy *unspeakable and full of Glory*.

§ 8. *Let us frequently consider the Range of lawful Pleasure, God has indulged to us, which we may enjoy with the Divine Allowance and Blessing.*

All reasonable Desires, all becoming Appetites and Inclinations; all the Senses of the Body, all the Passions and Affections of the Mind, are largely provided for; and what need any Man sin against God, wound his Conscience, defile, and damn his Soul for Pleasures, when there is enough to be had without all that Confusion which sinful ones unavoidably have entail'd upon them. There are indeed some Boundaries set,
but

22 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

but they are wide enough; there is as spacious a Field of Enjoyment as a Man, and a Christian, need to desire; and it is extreme fordid, to say, I can't be easie, pleased, nor quiet, unless I break thro' those Bounds, without which, even no Pleasure nor Property in the World could possibly subsist.

Why should I drink on to Intemperance? Christ has not forbid His Followers the use of the Vine, as *Mahomet* has done to his. I am allowed to drink for Refreshment; why should I sacrifice Time, Health, Life, Soul, and all to this World, and make so great an Idol of it? Has not God allowed me to mind the Affairs of it, to all needful Degrees of Attention? *To look well to my Herds, and to mind the State of my Flocks?* Why should I give way to exorbitant Passion? When I am allowed to be *Angry and sin not*. Need I take up Pleasures at so great a Discount, as the forfeiture of God's Favour, of the Peace of my Conscience? What need I borrow of lascivious Wantonness, Pleasures that run purer in a cleaner Channel? Is there not an Institution provided by God, for all the Pleasures of social Life, and of consummate Friendship? If *stollen Waters* are *sweet*, they are so only in the Mouth, they will be bitter in the Belly; they will be *bitterness in the latter End*; and like the Waters of Jealousie to the Guilty, cause rottenness and corruption; *When thy Flesh and thy Body are consumed, or thy Spirit defiled and destroyed. Drink Waters, therefore, out of thine own Cistern; nevertheless, to avoid Fornication, let every Man have his own Wife;* there are no difficulties attend that honourable State, comparable to those, wherewith the guilt and shame of Lewdness do overwhelm a Man's
Name

Name and Affairs thro' the righteous Judgment of God. While *Eſau* was eating his red Pottage, his greedy Appetite told him, that his Birthright was a trifle, compar'd to these sensitive Delights, but he did not think then, of that Cry, *that exceeding bitter Cry*, that followed upon it, when he found what he had sacrificed to a gust of Appetite, *Gen. 27. 34.* Why any Thing out of God's Way? Or otherwise than in the manner of his Allowance? His Allowance is large enough; and, for all our Objections against it, best concerted for the Happiness of the general World, which ought to be dearer to us than the gratification of particular Fancies. Was the Garden of God no Paradise, because there was one forbidden Tree in it? 'Twas but one that was forbidden; there was Variety and Plenty besides within their reach; *Of all the Trees of the Garden thou mayest freely eat.* It had been well for our first Parents, if in the height of Temptation they had took it into their Heads, to go round the Garden, from Tree to Tree, and to have tasted of all the allowed Pleasures there, since they were so eagerly bent upon Pleasure, such an Amusement in allowed Pleasures, might have diverted them from the forbidden Fruit, by the Enjoyment of that which was lawful. But so it is, let a Man's Circumstances be what they will, never so plentiful, or delightful, never so well accommodated, in the midst of a Paradise of allowed Pleasures, he is undone always for what is forbidden; he is uneasy, and fancies himself miserable, for want of that, which, it is certain Misery to meddle with.

24 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

§ 9. *Take to your selves the whole Armour of God.*

I have mention'd one Piece of it already, *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.* You have the several Pieces laid together in *Eph. 6. 11. Put on the whole Armour of God, that you may be able to stand against all the Wiles of the Devil. Ver. 12. That you may be able to stand in the evil Day. Ver. 14. Stand therefore, Stand, stand, stand,* as Combatants and not quit the Cause, nor yield, nor go back: Stand as Conquerors, and not fall before the Enemy. *Having your Loins girt with Truth, (i. e.) your Minds confirmed by Truth: Truth in the Judgment in Opposition to Error. Truth of Sincerity in Opposition to Hypocrisy. And Truth of Fidelity and Trustiness to God and Man. Having on the Breast-plate of Righteousness, (i. e.) such resolved Purpose of obeying God in all Things, and such gracious Habits, disposing us to it, that may guard the vital Parts, as effectually as that Piece of Armour does the Breast. The Feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace, (i. e.) having received the Truth in the Love of it, and your Mind being confirmed thereby in the inward Purpose of doing and suffering all that lies in your Way to Heaven; you are thereby as effectually prepared for a March thither, thro' all the Hardships and Labours of the Way, as those Feet that are well shod, are prepared to hold on steddily thro' Briars and Thorns, or any Roughness of the Way. Above all Things taking the Shield of Faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery Darts of the wicked, (i. e.) Faith in Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Faith in his Doctrine as my Rule, in his Life as*
my

my Pattern, and in his Death as the meritorious Cause of all my Good, and the moral Cause or Obligation to all the most grateful Returns. *The Love of Christ constraining us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, to the End that we who live should not henceforth live to our selves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again:* Faith in the Promises and Threatnings relating to Sin and Grace, and to another World; this Faith will shield off those Temptations that are like so many fiery Darts, while we say in our selves, no, I cannot do these Things, they are the very Things he died for; they are the very Things He died to save me *from*, before I can ever enjoy what he died to save me *to*. This is much the same with that Hope of Salvation which the Apostle here compares to an *Helmet*: Because a well-grounded Hope of eternal Life will enable us to bear off a Blow. The Connexion is plain, for *he that hath this Hope, purifieth himself, even as He is pure*, because this Purity is a Condition, without which it cannot be attained; and a Qualification for it, without which it cannot be enjoyed, if it could be attained.

§ 10. *Praying with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit*, Eph. 6. 18.

With all Prayer, publick and private, solemn and occasional, ordinary and extraordinary, stated and ejaculatory Prayer; *and Supplication in the Spirit*. Pray for the Spirit, and pray in the Spirit: For that divine Assistance, that Grace of God, that must teach, if ever we learn it, *to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present World*. A very great Man he was indeed, who under Temptation, knew no better Way, than imme-

D

diate

26 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

mediate Recourse to the Throne of Grace, for Grace and Mercy to help in Time of need. *There was sent me a Thorn in the Flesh* (says he) *for this I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.* I pray'd divers Times, I prayed again and again. If ever we conquer Sins effectually, it must be upon our Knees. We must be fervent in Prayer, and must keep our selves in a praying frame, and by dependance upon God, and application for His Grace, do the Honours due to that Power, without which *we can do nothing*: Without this humble Prayer for the assistance of Divine Grace, all I have hitherto said besides will avail little. This is so handsomly represented by a curious Writer, and in a manner so much to my Purpose, that I cannot forbear inserting his Words. Having taken Notice of some who exalt Nature above her due Measures, and invest her with such a self-sufficiency as would make the Grace of God appear superfluous; he goes on thus, † *Quid Opus est votis?* saith the Philosopher, What need is there to pray? Make thy self a good Man; 'tis idle to petition to God for that which thou canst bestow upon thy self. And many among Christians (besides *Pelagius*) seem to have consulted the Philosopher more than the Scriptures for their method of inculcating Religion, and a good Life. They recommend Virtue in pompous Harangues, and urge Religion from the rational Topics of Conveniency and Inconveniency; they display the amiableness and advantages of Good, and the deformity and mischiefs of Evil. “How ugly is Envy? How tormenting is Revenge? How brutal is Drunkenness?

† *Young's Sermon, Vol. 1.*

“ How

“ How pernicious is Lust? On the contrary,
“ Meekness, Temperance, and Beneficence;
“ How serene are they in their State, and how
“ commodious in their Effects? And needs a
“ Man now (say they) any infusion here to de-
“ termine his Choice? Or any assisting Influence
“ to put it in Execution? All that he seems to
“ need, is only this, that he do not turn fool and
“ desert the use of those Faculties and Powers
“ which Nature has given him”. After such a
moral Discourse as this, having called upon Reason,
and stir’d up Advertency to apply it, they
presume they have done enough, and leave us to
grow good upon our own Stock and Strength.
But alas! These are *Icarus’s* Flights, Nature has
provided no Wings for Man to soar so high with;
Vice will never be chased out of the World with
Invectives, nor Vertue advanced to her Empire
by Panegyricks: The most prudent Advertency,
and the most manly Resolutions, the most rational
Love, and the most generous Indignation
that ever opinionative Moralist could conceive,
and fortifie his Breast withal, will never be able
to secure a Man against the subtle Approaches,
or the violent Assaults of Sin. ’Tis only the Divine
Assistance that is our Castle and Defence,
and the vital Spring of all our good Habits; and
whosoever terminates his Hopes, even of serving
and pleasing God, upon the confidence of any
other Strength than what is derived from God,
his Hopes are Impious, and he must miscarry.
’Tis true, that rational Arguments are proper,
nay necessary to excite a Man to his Duty;
which is a rational Service, and effected by rational
Endeavours, not lazy Presumptions; but
then this is the Point, a Man must likewise
D 2 know,

28 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

know, that when he is about his Duty, he is not sufficient for that which he is about; for God has reserv'd a partial Agency to Himself; and He does as much command our Application to Him for His Assistance, as He does demand all the rest of our Duty. For as God does require us to keep His Commandments, so in Order to the doing of this, He does altogether as much require us to ask, to seek, and to knock; that is, to apply our selves for Ability to do what He commands: Which is done (I may add) by Two Things, by the use of all proper Means, and by an Application to God in humble Prayer for Assistance in the use of those Means, and a Blessing upon them; and therefore (continues he) he who shall undertake to Reason and Argue a Man into his Duty, without insisting on the necessary Application to God, does the same Thing in resemblance, as if he should cut off the Travellers Legs and provide him with a Staff. That one Instance of St. Peter to our Saviour, *Mat. 26. Tho' I should die with thee, yet will I not deny Thee*, being as stout a Resolution, upon as good Motives, and from as honest an Heart, as any Man else can ever dare to pretend to, has sufficiently baffled all humane Confidence, and demonstrated, that the Opinion of Strength in our selves is vanity, and the Issue of it defeat. Thus far my Author.

In so short a Prayer as our *Lord's Prayer*, you see, Christ would make room for one Petition against Temptations, *lead us not into Temptation*. Lord I am pursued by the worst Dangers, thou art my Refuge, I fly to Thee; I am attack'd by the worst of Enemies, save me, O Lord, for in thy Succours *do I put my Trust*, against the Cunning, the Power, the Malice of *those that lye in wait*

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 29

wait for my Soul. I have known the Time, when my Convictions were clear, and my Resolutions hearty, and I have thought my self fortified against all that the Enemy could do, and it has all melted away upon the first return of the tempting Occasion; Lord, remove the Occasions, abate their Force, weaken their Impressions, strengthen my Resolves; give me the Graces that are opposite to my darling Corruption; give me such Humility as may take away the Vanity and Conceit, and Self-valuation that seldom fails of being mortified both by God and Man; give me that Temperance that may keep me from running to the *same excess of Riot with the rest of the World*; give me that love of God and of Divine Pleasures, and such a contentedness with thine Allowance that may save me from all Excesses, and never suffer me to be a *lover of Pleasures more than a lover of God*: that I may not only keep from the bench of the Drunkard, and the lap of *Dalilah*, and from playing with those sparks that may burn down to the lowest Hell; but may cleanse my self from all filthiness both of *Flesh and Spirit*, perfecting Holiness in the fear of God. Hast thou not said, *If any Man lack Wisdom let him ask it of God, ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find*? That thou givest Power to the faint, and to them that have no might thou renewest Strength? Hear now when I call upon Thee, *Oh Lord God of my Righteousness, help, save, and deliver, for thy Names sake.*

Prayer is an excellent Means of resisting Temptations, as it calls off the Thoughts from the Matter of the Temptation, and turns them another Way; as it raises the Spirit and Soul to heavenly Things, and puts us directly under their Influence,
and

30 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

and into the immediate Presence of God; as it puts us into the way of the Promises, and is a performing of the Condition on our Part, upon which the Aids of his Grace are given; and puts us into a Temper and Disposition the better to receive the Succours of the Divine Spirits which either keeps us from Temptations, or helps us through them.

§ II. *Watching thereunto with all Perseverance; joyn watchfulness with Prayer.*

Without this all the rest is to no Purpose; our very Graces themselves can't preserve us. We may be surprized with all our Armour about us, as a Town may be, though never so well fortified, if there be no Centinels upon their Watch. 'Tis for this Reason the Scripture joyns Prayer and Watchfulness together, *Mat. 26. 41. Watch and pray that you enter not into Temptation.* Watch, that you may do your Part; Pray, that God may do His. Watch, for God won't do all; Pray, for you can't: Pray, for *without Him you can do nothing*; and watch, for without that your Prayers are good for nothing. It is watching that makes Prayer effectual, and proves it sincere; 'tis praying that makes your watching be to any Purpose. Watch against

} Outward Occasions,
} Inward Motions.

1. *Watch against the outward Occasions and Objects*, to avoid them, and thereby disappoint the Devil; withdraw the fuel from corrupt Nature, and act upon the prudent Maxim, that Prevention is better than Cure, tho' never so infallible.

What a dismal train of Consequences has one glance of the Eye sometime drawn after it? One turn away of the Head at a proper Time, one resolute

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 31

resolute bold Step away from the Door of a Gaming House, or Tavern; from the known Resort of ensnaring Company, might have saved such an ones Estate that's now lost, and anothers Body and Life that is now consum'd; might have saved such an one from rotting in a Goal, and another from the Damnation of Hell. It's nonsense to pretend to keep our selves from our Iniquity, if we do not watch against the Occasions of it, Time, Place, and Persons, or according to the wise Man's Comparison, *We may as well pretend to take Fire in our Bosom, and hope not to be burnt.* When *Ulysses* was resolved not to be taken with those Charms that had undone so many, he would not allow himself to hear the *Syren's* Voice, but stopt his Ears with Wax, and took a method to baffle his Inclinations even before they rose: The Poet it seems understood the Nature of Things so well, as to teach us thereby, that they who are resolved not to fall into a Snare, must avoid the Occasion. It is a Jest for a Person to spend one part of the Day in finding out the occasions of Sin, hunting out such and such Companions and Places, and then come home and pray, *Lord, lead us not into Temptation*; that is, to haunt the Pest-house, and yet pray against the Plague. That lovely young Man, *Joseph*, might have said an hundred Times, *How can I do this Thing and sin against God*, and yet might have done it at last, had he not at the same Time resolved against the occasion of the Sin; for it is said, *He bearkned not unto her to be with her*, Gen. 39. 10. He that would keep from the Sin, must keep out of the Way.

Remove thy Way far from her, come not nigh the Door of her House. Enter not

Prov. 5. 8.

into

32 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

*into the Path of the Wicked, and go not
Prov. 4. 14, 15. in the Way of evil Men. Avoid, pass
by, turn from it, and pass away.* 'Tis
worth our while at any Time, to go a great
way round about, to avoid falling into a Pit.
David should have avoided that sauntering idle
Frame he was in, and have observed the Cove-
nant with his Eyes. *Judas* should have resigned
the Bag, and not held that pilfiring occasion to
his covetous Nature. *Peter* should have kept out
of the High Priest's Hall.

2. *Watch to suppress the first inward Motives and
Inclinations.*

Conscience, when it is in a good State will
quickly alarm us, and give us warning; observe,
says Conscience, that motion of the Blood, that
flash of the animal Spirits, it is an ambitious heat
of Thought, down with it, crush it at once,
now it is easily to be stifled; be as bold as you
will in the Cause of God, dare to be good and
upright; Religion has nothing sneaking in it,
but makes the Righteous bold as a Lion; and
forms otherguest Heroes than Pride and Vanity
can do; but this is an intemperate Sally —.
When at another Time, Conscience calls upon
you to take notice of another motion of the Blood,
that is a lustful Heat, vigorously, and without
parly, crush the Cockatrice in the Egg, it is
more easily done, than when it is grown a Ser-
pent. *Keep thine Heart thus with all Diligence, for
out of that are the Issues of Life; Life and Death,
Happiness or Misery, depend upon this Matter;
the suppressing the first Motions. Properly speak-
ing, this is all the Resistance we can make, for,
it is too late, very often, to resist effectually,
when the Sin has gone farther than the first mo-
tion;*

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 33

tion; when the Imagination is fired; when the Affections are mutinying in favour of Flesh and Blood, the Fancy that is heated by Lust has an Influence upon the Judgment, darkens the Understanding, and thereby stops the Passages through which the Succours should come to our Relief; and at the same Time pours in fresh Forces for the Enemy, from false Reasoning, fallacious Maxims, strong Inclinations, Customs of the World, Commonness, &c. that a Man may as well hope to stop after his Feet are over the Precipice; therefore, quickly throw it off, turn to something else; stifle it by main strength of Mind, exerting the Grace that God has given us for that purpose; this is the ordinary Way of escaping or overcoming: If ever we are preserved after we have gone farther, that's all Miracle, and is not ordinarily to be expected.

II. The Reasons and Motives to persuade us to follow these Directions, and to keep our selves from our Iniquity.

§ 1. *Hard as it is, it is yet possible the Thing may be done.*

Every Body will own, that it is sometimes very hard, hard as *cutting off a right Hand, or plucking out a right Eye*, to which it is compared; nay, it is sometimes compared to Things that are next to impossible, *Can the Æthiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots?* *then may they that are accustomed to do evil learn to do well.* Yet it may be done, if you are not wanting to your self, for God and His Grace will not be wanting to you. * If there

E

was

34 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

was not Grace immediately ready to help in this Time of need, then you might lye still, and cry, I can't do it; but to say you can do nothing, when you have God's promis'd Grace to help you to do every Thing, is a prevaricating with God in the Language of Humility. When Christ says, *Of your selves you can do nothing*, He means, abstracted from, and without the help of Divine Grace; but when you say in excuse of your lying still, and neglecting the Grace of God, that, of your selves you can do nothing, and therefore will do nothing, you mean not to use that promis'd Grace, that is always ready to help you to do what you can't do of your selves: This makes that to be a lie in your Mouth, that was a Truth in Christ's; for tho' it's a Truth, that I can do nothing without Divine Help, it's a lie to say, I can do nothing with it; which is the Case of those who lye still under that pretence, because we put them upon doing nothing without the Grace of God. Now it is the same Thing, in effect, as if I could do every Thing, if I have that Grace ready to do for me, what I can't do my self. There's nothing too hard for the Grace of God, and what you can't do, that will, and does, in the use of the Means prescribed. *I can do all Things through Him that strengtheneth me*; and Grace it self can do nothing if it be not used. Of our selves, 'tis true, we can do nothing, but then, 'tis as true, that of our selves we cannot breath, step, speak, nor subsist without God, *in whom we Live, and Move, and have our Being*; but yet we breath, speak, step, walk, and eat, without ever distrusting the Divine Concurrence, and without a tedious dispute concerning

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 35

cerning it, we lift up our Feet, and put our Hands to our Mouths.

§ 2. *It may be done, and must be done, for nothing else in the World will do instead of this, keeping our selves from our own Iniquity.*

Not all that we can do or suffer besides, is any Thing; without this our Prayers are to no purpose; *If we regard this Iniquity in our Hearts the Lord will not hear us*, Psal. 66. 18. And if He will not hear our Prayers, He will not regard all the rest of our Religion. The Mercy of God wont do instead of this. Mercy will cover the worst of Sin that we turn from. *Because he hath consider'd, and turned from all his Transgressions which he hath committed, he shall surely live, and shall not die*, Ezek. 18. 28. but Mercy will hide none of those which we wilfully continue in; because, the Grace of God is thereby turned into Wantonness, which ought to have led us to Repentance. The Merits of Christ cannot do instead of it, nor any lazy Presumption upon them; for, can a liberty to continue in Sin be one of the Benefits purchas'd by Christ? Did He not come to redeem us from all Iniquity, and to save His People from their Sins? To continue in them is to defeat the Redemption we trust in.

Some hope by Charity to bribe God Almighty to excuse them in their darling Sin, and to compound with Him for it, they will part with their Money to the Poor, build upon the sound of that Text, *That Charity covereth a multitude of Sins*; when, alas, the Sense of it is quite another Thing, and means, not the Charity of Almsgiving, but the Charity of Candour and Moderation, that inclines us to cover others Sins from

36 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

the World, and not to expose them. There is nothing meant of covering our Sins *from God*, which nothing can do but Divine Forgiveness; and as to their giving Alms with such intentions, it only shews, that they love their darling Sin better than Money. I should throw away your Time, should I expose some other dependencies of the Ignorant and Superstitious, such as the Absolution of a Priest, and the use of several superstitious Whims, whereby poor Creatures are cheated of their Souls, and Money too. *You have not so learned Christ*, as to imagine that Heaven or Earth can save the Man, whom the Divine Sentence condemns, as it does all those that are under the Dominion of Sin. That any Man can have a Commission from God to act contrary to God's positive Declarations, which annex Salvation to Holiness and Uprightness only, the Evidence of which is, *keeping our selves from our Iniquity. Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord*, though he be absolved by all the Priests in the World.

§ 3. Consider that *this thy darling Sin can never go alone*, it will be attended by others that wait upon it, and subserve it; or if it could be alone, that alone were enough to ruin thee, as it hinders thy complete Conversion, by retaining thee under its Dominion, and will of it self consign thee over to the Judgment of God.

§ 4. Consider how far even some *Heathens have gone in keeping themselves from their own Iniquity*, out of scorn that any Lust should domineer over them. How did *Socrates*, by natural Temper the most Cholerick of Men, by Practice striving and curbing himself, become an Example of Meekness and Steadiness of Mind, fit to be

be compared with a *Moses*. How will the Christian (so called) who for the Love of Money will sell his Country to Misery, and his Soul to the Devil; How, I say, will he be able to look that *Lacedemonian* General in the Face, who, when the King of *Persia* would have bribed him against his Country's Interest, *No*, says he, *if he will bribe me, he must send me his Crown and Scepter*. When I read that *Scipio*, while General in *Spain*, was presented with the most exquisite Beauties, and yet, would never after suffer them to come into his sight, that he might cut off the *outward Occasions*; and that young *Alexander*, took the same Course to conquer himself, after he had conquer'd the World; I am fired with Indignation, to see less Honour done to infinitely better Principles; to see the Christian, with all his Light about him, and with all his better Prospects before him, and all his Graces within him, so out-done and put to shame.

§ 5. Consider the *many Saints that have practised, and are practising this, of keeping themselves from their Iniquity, with great Success, Pleasure and Satisfaction*. The glorious Company of the Apostles, the goodly Fellowship of the Prophets, the noble Army of Martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the World, who not only deny themselves, but suffer hard Things in defiance of Sin and Satan, show the way, and provoke to follow: Those Christians who now set you this Example, it may be, have not more Knowledge, nor more Grace than you, nor greater Encouragement and Assistance. They keep themselves from their Iniquity, some of them, with greater difficulty, trouble, and hardship than you need be at. They
are

38 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

are not Statues, void of Sense, nor Angels void of Passions, any more than you; they feel the Impression made by Objects, and the Appetite springing forward to meet them as well as you.

§ 6. *Keeping your selves from this Iniquity, it will be more easie to keep from any other; it will facilitate your Conquest over all the rest. This is the Goliath that longest defies the Powers of the living God, and when this falls, the rest will be a more easie Victory.*

§ 7. *He that yields to this darling Sin, is in a fair way of yielding to all the rest in time.*

You say now, were I but indulged in this, I would defie all others; yes, till others Sins came to be as much beloved as this, as they would be in their Course, upon your Indulgence in this; and then, the Petition would be in behalf of the next favourite Lust, and so on. The Indulgence to this, hardens the Conscience, and prepares for the next Sin that becomes as pleasant. Besides, when a Man takes one step in Sin, neither he nor any Man alive knows where he will stop. *David* no more thought that Murder and Adultery would be the Consequence of that heedless Wander of his Eyes, than *Hazael* did, that he was a Dog. And therefore (as one says) it's ill trying Conclusions with Fire and Gunpowder.

§ 8. *Every Conquest of this darling Sin will facilitate the next Conquest over the same Sin, whereas every yielding will make it harder to resist the next Time.*

§ 9. This is the Sin that keeps you low in your Graces and Comforts; thy Faith weak, thy Hope feeble, thy Love cool, and consequently thy Joy

The Preservative of Virtuous Youth. 39

Joy like a Brook that fails, which would be as a River, if thy Righteousness were as a mighty Stream.

§ 10. The Honour of Religion, and the Success of all you have been doing in it hitherto, depends upon the Conquest of this; and will you loose the Things you have wrought?

§ 11. Consider how dear this Sin has cost our Lord Jesus Christ; the Sorrows and Sufferings, the Labours, Agony and Groans, the Blood and Death; and can all this be made so light of?

§ 12. How pleasing it will be to Him to see thee vigorously bear up against it for His sake, but grievous and offensive to Him to see this great Rival of Christ in thy Heart, gain the better in the Competition.

§ 13. Consider how dear it has sometimes already cost thee, and how much more so it is likely to do, if it be not conquer'd at last. Why should the Occasion be repeated of so much pain, trouble, sorrow, and uneasiness of Mind? Resistance of it, though unto Blood, will never cost thee so dear as Compliance and Commission; be sure your Sin will find you out, both in this World, in a Time of trouble, sickness and death; and in the other World, either in the loss of thy Happiness, or diminution of it.

§ 14. Consider the Blessings that attend and reward thy resolute Resistance. What a glorious Triumph will crown thy Conquest? With what flourish and show will the Redemer hand them forward into the Presence of God and of His holy Angels? As it were with the sound of Trumpet, proclaiming, These are they who have not defiled themselves with Women. These are they that

40 *The Preservative of Virtuous Youth.*

that have kept themselves unspotted from the World. These are they that have been faithful unto Death, and they shall receive the Crown of Life. To conclude, If we thus keep our selves from our Iniquity, if we lay aside every Weight, and the Sin that does so easily beset us, our Graces will thrive, our Souls will flourish, our Righteousness will be as a Stream, and our Peace as a mighty River. The Joy of the Lord will be our Strength, and the Glory of God will be our sure Reward.

F I N I S.



